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CAPITOL STUFF

By TED LEWIS

Washington, April 22—Candidates for the Republican Presidential nomination who are considering accepting President Johnson's magnanimous offer of secret national security information should be warned that if they do so they are going to be more confused than enlightened.

The President's idea was, of course, honestly aimed at "encouragement of responsible discussion" of cold war issues. But anyone privy to any of the classified data knows that it raises more questions than it answers.

What, for example, could Barry Goldwater or Gov. Rockefeller get in the way of information about Viet Nam that would be helpful in their pre-convention discussion of that critical South-east Asia situation?

Under Johnson's edict they could get secret briefings from the State Department, Pentagon and Central Intelligence Agency.

These three agencies of government have never seen eye to eye on exactly what is going on in South Viet Nam or what should be done about the tricky problem. Each would be happy to pass along the information that the reason the situation is fouled up is due to operations of an agency other than itself.

All three would, of course, supply from secret files a whole raft of material indicating that the new Gen. Nguyen Khanh government is making a real effort to stabilize affairs. But all the estimates of whether he can succeed would be along the line of "maybe" or "perhaps," which amounts in essence to "we don't know but are hoping."

The secret data would show also that there is a controversy among the Administration's own "Far East experts" concerning how Red China would respond if South Viet Namese troops ever were allowed to invade the Communist North. And that another controversy exists as to whether, if they should do so, they would have to be supported by U.S. air power so that another Bay of Pigs type of fiasco would not occur.

In its final essence, all that Goldwater, Rockefeller or Harold E. Stassen would get out of briefings on Viet Nam is solid information showing the area of disagreement within the Administration about what should be done.



Ambassador Lodge
The man in the middle

There could be one solid nugget of valuable campaign material, however. That would turn up if they were allowed a look at the files of communication between Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge and Washington. These, without much question, would show that Lodge is so committed to present Administration policy decisions concerning that area that he could not make Viet Nam an issue if nominated at the GOP National Convention.

And what would a GOP candidate find out about Cuba that would be new and helpful? He would find out that there is some disagreement among the White House, State Department and Defense Department about the number of Soviet troops in Cuba. The White House plays with the figure 4,000 and about how only 500 or 800 will be left if the scheduled spring exodus goes forward as indicated.

Defense intelligence and the CIA lean to a 7,000 figure and 1,200 or more Soviet military "advisers" remaining after the SAM missile sites go under Fidel Castro's control.

And what would Goldwater or Rockefeller learn from access to security data about the Administration's intentions should Castro shoot down our U-2 reconnaissance planes, despite President Johnson's strong warning?

Goldwater Already Has Access to Data

Not one solitary important thing that they couldn't figure out for themselves. Namely, of course, that a lot of plans for "contingencies" are being drawn up, such as an airstrike knocking out the SAM missile sites or an emergency conference of our South American allies to determine a course of action, etc., etc.

And anybody is nuts who thinks that Goldwater, if privy to secret intelligence info, would have to backtrack on his charges about how the Russians have a lot more ICBMS than the U.S.

In the first place, this kind of information is already available to him in large part as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

What Goldwater has said is that the Soviets have at least a hundred more long range and intermediate range missiles than we have. The Pentagon denies this. But how can anything be proved? The number of missiles the Russians have must be based on estimates from our intelligence sources.


We don't say it would be a waste of time for Goldwater or Rockefeller to get secret briefings. At least they would find out the extent of disagreement within the Administration over policy matters. But in the process they take the risk of confusing themselves at the same time, losing the advantage of clear-cut issues, which can be pressed best when one is a little less informed than well informed.

Kennedy Was Lucky in 1960

John F. Kennedy was lucky that way in 1960. President Eisenhower offered, and JFK accepted, a chance to be briefed in intelligence matters by then CIA chief Allen Dulles.

Dulles, fortunately for Kennedy, did not consider the training of Cuban exiles for an invasion an intelligence matter. So Kennedy had a nice clear-cut issue about Communism's being 90 miles from our shores and the Republicans doing nothing about it.

It is undoubtedly obvious to all seekers of the GOP Presidential nomination that the less they know about Administration security and intelligence secret matters or projects, the better off they might well be in the fall campaign.



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